

RICE, WATER, and BIRDS

Around the world, cultivated rice fields can serve as important, even vital, habitat for a wide variety of birds, from wintering ducks and geese, to migrating shorebirds to resident rails and wading birds.

Rice is the world's most important staple crop. It provides the main source of calories for over half the world's human population; global production is over 500 million tons per year and constitutes almost 30% of the world's grain supply; and over 145 million hectares of rice are planted annually.

Rice also is a crop that has become extremely important to bird conservation in many parts of the world. Since rice is typically grown in flooded conditions, rice fields have the potential to function as surrogate ecosystems for wetland-dependent bird species if managed appropriately. This is especially valuable as wetland drainage and degradation continue to be major contributors to biodiversity losses.

Capitalizing on the value of rice fields managed with bird conservation in mind provides a valuable complement to the more fundamental conservation goal of protecting natural habitats. Recently, a Rice and Waterbirds Working Group formed around this approach and is addressing needs in three areas: research, identification and promotion of best management practices, and outreach.



Visit the Rice, Water, Birds website at <http://birds.fws.gov/waterbirds/rice.html>

Join the listserve set up for information exchange.

Explore the compilation of relevant publications and project links.

Participate in regionally-tailored workshops on management practices.

Rice and Waterbirds Working Group

Purpose: To promote conservation of aquatic birds using habitats associated with rice cultivation.

Goals:

1. To engage with rice growers and other stakeholders to better conserve waterbirds using ricefield habitats;
2. To understand the ecological, agronomic, economic and social dimensions of the bird/rice relationship;
3. To develop management and policy recommendations to optimize this relationship; and
4. To communicate and promote conservation and related marketing strategies.

Steering committee for the Rice and Waterbirds Working Group: Chris Elphick (Chair), Rafael Antunes Dias, Paul Baicich, Daniel Blanco, Garry Donaldson, Charles Duncan, Catherine Hickey, Sammy King, Lourdes Mugica, Kathy Parsons & Jennifer Wheeler.

King Rail: Frank Johnson

Ricefield/Crested Screamers: Daniel Blanco

